



apuntes

Reflexiones teológicas desde el contexto Hispano-Latino

De-Colonizing Heaven:

A De-colonial Reading of Columbus' Colonial Soteriology

Filipe Maia

Decolonizing Home

Re-envisioning Nomadic Identities at the Border of Globalization

An Yountae

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Apuntes

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From the Editor

It is with great joy and a tremendous sense of satisfaction that I offer these introductory words to the articles included in this issue of *Apuntes*; and the readers will soon discover the valuable contributions and implications of these important perspectives, since they provide insights and critical analysis as we continue on our search for our voices and historical identity, not only in the U.S. but also in Latin America. In this search many of us are familiar with the themes and sad consequences of colonialism and imperialism, both in the US and in Latin America. And in response to these "colonial" impositions and oppressive practices, which were instrumental not only in securing political and territorial domination, but also cultural and theological domination, Filipe Maia and An Yountae have provided two solid alternatives which represent an attempt to name and remove these colonial impositions by offering "decolonizing" perspectives and suggesting new approaches to understand soteriology and our home identity.

The authors are writing not only from a theoretical and academic perspective, but also from their personal experiences and reflecting on their identity journeys. Filipe Maia, was born and raised in Brazil in the Methodist tradition; he received a Bachelor's degree in Theology and Philosophy from the Methodist University of São Paulo (Brazil) and a Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology (SMU, Dallas) and is currently enrolled in the Doctor of Theology (ThD) program at Harvard Divinity School. The article in this number is a short version of his master's thesis. An Yountae, a Korean-born Argentinian, is currently a Ph.D. student in philosophical theology at Drew University. His research interests include constructive theology, decolonial thinking, continental philosophy, gender studies, and Latin American philosophy.

I hope and pray that in reading these articles we may be able to see the value of their perspectives and the importance of "decolonizing" these and other aspects of our lives, communities, and society as a whole, as we continue to search and define our identity free from colonial impositions.

De-Colonizing Heaven

A De-colonial Reading of Columbus' Colonial Soteriology¹

Filipe Maia

Introduction

The birth of the colonial era with the occupation of the Americas by the European colonizers was not exclusively the result of technological developments in navigation, neither the sole result of the search for an alternative commercial route to reach India. Certainly combined with all these factors and others, the birth of modern colonialism is a result of a deep *theological* development. The texts and documents of European explorers and scientists of the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are in many ways attempts to theologize in the context of a new world previously unknown to Europe. What is striking to me in particular is that as this new "earth" began to unravel its shapes in front of European eyes, Christians started to dream about the new heaven that should follow this "discovery." Feminist postcolonial theologian Kwok Pui-lan rightly notes that the medieval spirit of the crusades created an atmosphere of a "spiritual journey" that prepared Christians for the "eternal journey from earth to heaven."² In fact, in the colonial mindset formed in sixteenth-century Europe, the "discovery" of the Americas had a dual meaning: it was the occupation of a new earth and its people and resources, but also the occupation of a new time, an epoch of the Spirit, the time of salvation for all the peoples of the earth.

For this reason, addressing the colonial soteriology of this period is an important task for the critique of colonialism and the theological legacy it has left in the Americas. It is clear to several authors that colonialism is imbued in soteriological discourse. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri C. Spivak has famously framed the colonial project as that of "white men saving brown

¹ This article is an edited version of my thesis presented as part of the Master of Theological Studies program at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX. I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Dr. Joerg Rieger and to my readers, Dr. Jessica Boon and Dr. Hugo Magallanes for their assistance in the research and compilation of this essay. Dr. Rieger, in particular, has offered several insights for the continuation of my research.

² Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 13.

women from brown men.”³ In the field of theology, Sharon Betcher has helpfully talked about a “salvific imperialism” in her study about colonialism and disability studies.⁴ Latin American philosophers and theologians are also acute in their perception of the idolatrous association of colonialism and salvation: “[Colonial] domination produces its diverse victims and justifies its actions as a sacrifice... Civilizing heroes transform their victims into holocausts of salvific sacrifice...”⁵ Salvation is the mediating discourse bridging the brutality of the colonizer with the softness of the promised sweet-hereafter.⁶

Therefore, the association of projects of power and their colonial soteriology deserves our full attention: what are the marks of the salvation promised by empire? How are we to discern the “false gods” and their promises of salvation from the God of life and the promise of life in abundance? How can Christian soteriology articulated from the margins of history resist the colonial project of salvation? Indeed, these broad and challenging questions need to be addressed and what I try to do with this essay is no more than raise some issues as I look into the soteriological themes that

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 296.

⁴ Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), see especially chapter 5.

⁵ Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, Translated by Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 136-137. Other important texts in this tradition are: Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Sacrificios Humanos y Sociedad Occidental: Lucifer y la Bestia*. 2nd Edition. (San José, Costa Rica, 1993); Jung Mo Sung, *A Idolatria do Capital e a Morte dos Pobres: Uma reflexão Teológica a partir da Dívida Externa* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1989).

⁶ Without stretching our minds too much, we can easily detect this imperial soteriology alive and well in our midst if we recall that the most pervasive expression among neo-liberal capitalists during the economic meltdown of 2008-2009 was precisely that of “saving the banks.” What was little discussed in these circles (to further the theological metaphor just a little bit) is what was/is the *sin* of the banks and against whom they sin. See, for example: Peter Boone and Simon Johnson, “To save the banks we must stand up for the bankers,” *Financial Times*, Jan 26, 2009, in: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7f76fb22-ebb7-11dd-8838-0000779fd2ac.html>, accessed on Nov 12, 2010.

Christopher Columbus tackles in his theological interpretation of the Spanish enterprise in what later became known as the “Americas.”⁷

As I already inferred previously, I take the occupation of the Americas as a *theological* problem. That is to say, in this essay I am taking colonialism and its invasion of the Americas as a theological endeavor – that of saving the “Indians” and bringing about a new epoch of the Spirit. So far, it is Luis N. Rivera Pagán who has best articulated this basic premise and thus critiqued the colonial project in the Americas theologically.⁸ He opens his book *Evangelización y Violencia* by stating that the problem in much of the historical studies in early colonialism is precisely its lack of attention to the “primacy of theological discourse in the ideological production” of colonialism and, furthermore, that neglecting the *Christian* “imperial ideology” is nothing but a “vulgar materialism.”⁹ Contrary to that, he later stresses that indeed “saving the soul of the ‘infidels’ and ‘Gentiles’” became the true “legal and theological justification in the process of armed dominion of the New World.”¹⁰ Empires, among several things, create religions and theologies that are part of its all-encompassing project of domination. Theology not only “justified” colonialism (as a tool helping in the construction of something else); theology is part of colonialism and both shapes and is shaped by colonialism.¹¹ There is, in

⁷ The naming of the land and the images associated with America are an interesting theme of discussion as it reflects in many aspects the patriarchal association of the land with the female body. In this sense, “America” is the wife of Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian navigator that firstly proposed that the lands they had arrived were in fact a new continent. Referring to an image painted by Jan Van der Straet in 1575, Michel de Certeau writes a fascinating preface to his book *The Writing of History* where he associates the writing of history and the naming of the land as the control tools of the colonizers. See: Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, transl. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. xxv-xxvi.

⁸ Luis N. Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y Violencia: La Conquista de América*, 2nd ed (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial CEMI, 1991).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1; 28 (My translation).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41. For similar notes on the importance of theology on the colonial project in the Americas, see: Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. 21; Joerg Rieger, “Liberating God-Talk: Postcolonialism and the Challenge of the Margins,” in: Keller, Nausner, and Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies*, p. 218.

¹¹ In fact, the notion that theology “justifies” something presupposes that theology is detached from the thing that it is trying to justify. In my case here, if theology were to justify the exploitation of the Americas, one must assume that theology is independent from the power relations that are at stake when the first settlers began the invasion of the “new world.” My point thus is that colonialism is from the beginning theological and the very invention of the colonial project is a theological endeavor.

sum, something that we could correctly name as a *colonial* theology. More to the point of my project here, there is equally something we can name as a colonial *soteriology*.

My choice of studying an explorer-colonizer who theologizes as he travels across the seas is tentative to evince this matter. Columbus, the Genoese Admiral of the Ocean Sea, is a remarkable example of a theologian that articulates well his theology with the colonial project. Scholars working with his texts have constantly pointed out to his messianic beliefs in himself and on the eschatological meaning of his mission in the "Indies."¹² He is a well-versed person and intentionally engages in conversation with the major authorities of the Christian theological tradition. His excitement about the new lands and opportunities to the west is always balanced with the proclamation of the need for the evangelization of the new colonies. From the beginning the colonizers constructed a colonial soteriology that grounded the expansion of European territory to the new American lands.

With this essay I will be addressing the issue of this colonial soteriology by engaging in the reading of Columbus' accounts of his voyages to the Americas in his journals, letters to the Spanish authorities, and on his *Libro de las Profecias*, compiled by the end of his life. Three themes will be highlighted as the basis of the salvific discourse latent in Columbus' theology: (1) the association of the colonizers as the "people from the heaven" – a theological statement Columbus puts in the mouths of Amerindians; (2) the geo-erotic "discovery" of the earthly paradise at the "nipple" of a woman's breast on the shores of the Orinoco river; and (3) the articulation of a theology of history that placed the discovery of the Americas as the grand sign of the coming of the parousia. These themes articulated in Columbus' texts form a theological body that identifies a savior, a theory of the salvific space, and its proper history of salvation. After presenting and criticizing these themes, I will conclude with a reflection about what I take to be the center of Columbus' colonial soteriology and invite some further discussion about this matter.

To conclude this introduction, a historiographical note is important. As Michel de Certeau points out in the opening pages of his book *The Writing of History*, the colonial historiography is a "*writing that conquers*," a writing that "fabricates Western history" on the bodies of the oppressed peoples of the Americas.¹³ The historical readings I will be making in this essay are opposed

¹² Delno C. West and August Kling, eds., *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus: an en face edition* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 2-3.

¹³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. xxv-xxvi.

to the colonial historiography as it focuses in the history of those who are past-less in this colonial historiography and theology.¹⁴ It is an attempt, as Mayra Rivera put it, “to remember toward a different future.”¹⁵ The theology of salvation I am pursuing here is not neutral – it is an attempt (admittedly immature) of finding an alternative soteriology based on those who were projected and invented as the damned. It is a soteriology of the salvation-less of history articulated as a critique of the soteriology of the powerful with the faith that God saves differently than the emperors do.

The people from heaven

The soteriological imagery present in Columbus’ enterprise in navigating west was inscribed in the name of the first piece of land spotted by the Admiral’s fleet. Columbus baptized the island where he first landed in October 1492 as *San Salvador*, the island of the Holy Savior.¹⁶ It is needless to say that naming the land is a theological act of Christianizing and occupying such earth. In this sense, what is worth noting in the case of Columbus and *his* island of San Salvador, is the message being transferred to the native peoples of Guanahani: be aware!, the saviors have arrived.

As I briefly posited in my introduction, recent scholarship discussing the life and work of Columbus has increasingly paid attention to his religious inclinations and, more precisely, to the millenarian nature of his faith. Columbus was very closely related to Franciscan circles where the eschatology

¹⁴ In this sense, I should stress that this essay follows the tenets proposed by Latin American philosophy and theology of liberation. In 1958, for example, Mexican philosopher Edmundo O’Gorman published his important book *La Invención de América* in which he deconstructs the ideological formation of the idea of the discovery and opts for the crucial notion of the *invention* of the Americas. Enrique Dussel expands this thesis in *1492: El Encubrimiento del Otro* and, more recently, Walter Dignolo has continued the discussion having in mind the new socio-political situation in Latin America and the Latino/a population in the United States. See: Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961); Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*; Dignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*.

¹⁵ Mayra Rivera, “Ghostly Encounters: Spirits, Memory, and the Holy Ghost,” in: Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Planetary Loves: Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 130.

¹⁶ Dunn and Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America*, 77.

of Joachim de Fiore was thriving in sixteenth-century Spain.¹⁷ Despite his lack of formal theological education, Columbus was well-versed in the philosophical and ecclesial tradition and was a devout reader of the Bible. His strong pneumatology guided his entire epistemology of discovery and oriented his intuitions as to where to navigate. Columbus did not navigate with the compass alone, he believed he was being guided by the Holy Spirit.

In an article published in 1986, Leonard Sweet argues that "[t]he history of America begins with the quest for the millennium."¹⁸ Quite clearly, Columbus understands himself as the "Christ - bearer" (Christoferens, a play with his name¹⁹), the one chosen by God to unveil the events that would ultimately lead to the end of times: "Just as John the Baptist was the precursor who announced Christ to the ancient world," historian Delno C. West observes, "Columbus was the messenger to the New World."²⁰ Admittedly, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea interpreted the mission to the west as the historical chance to preach the gospel to the indigenous peoples and find gold so that Jerusalem could be once again in Christian hands: the "New World was to redeem the Old City," as James Cummins put it.²¹

The quest for gold and the salvation of the peoples of the land is transversal in Columbus' account of his navigations. Writing to the Spanish King and Queen from the day he left the port of Palos in Spain on August 1492, Columbus praises the monarchs for the victory against the "Moorish King" in Granada and sets the stage for his exhilarating adventure in the Ocean Sea in these terms: "you [the King and Queen] thought of sending me, Christóban Colón, to the said regions of India to see the said princes and the peoples of the land, and the characteristics of the land and of everything, and to see how their conversion to our Holy Faith might be undertaken."²² By the end of November

¹⁷ The classical study in Joachimism is Marjorie Reeves' *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: a Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1969).

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, "Christopher Columbus and the Millennial Vision of the New World," *The Catholic Historical Review* LXXII, n. 3 (July 1986), p. 370-372.

¹⁹ Columbus' signature in the end of his letters and the reference to the "Christ-bearer" title is a great puzzle to his interpreters. For detailed discussion about this matter, see: Sweet, "Christopher Columbus and the Millennial Vision of the New World," 376ff; see also West and Kling, eds., *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*, 70ff.

²⁰ West and Kling, eds., *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*, 63.

²¹ Cited in: *Ibid.*, 65.

²² Dunn and Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America*, 19.

1492, some forty days after he landed in San Salvador, the Admiral admonishes the Spanish monarchs "not to consent that any foreigner set foot or trade here except Catholic Christians, since the beginning and the end of the enterprise was the increase and glory of the Christian Religion."²³ We have no reasons to believe that Columbus was not being honest with such claims; the mission to reach the Indies was indeed a mission of faith.

This assurance about the soteriological nature of the trip to the Indies is projected onto Columbus' perception of the native peoples he encounters in San Salvador and later on the other islands where he lands. The "Indians" are described as having no religion at all and for this reason, apt to receive Christianity as their religion. This is Columbus' first report of his impressions about the Amerindians:

They should be good and intelligent *servants*, for I see that they say very quickly everything that is said to them; and I believe that they would become Christians very easily, for it seemed to me that *they had no religion* [ninguna secta tenian]. Our Lord pleasing, at the time of my departure I will take six of them from here to Your Highnesses *in order that they may learn to speak*.²⁴ [Emphases added]

The "conversion to our Holy Faith," allegedly Columbus' major project when navigating west, is facilitated by the fact that the peoples of San Salvador are, in short, mute servants with no religion. The missionary task is thus made easy: "they are fit to be ordered about and made to work, plant, and do everything else that may be needed, and build towns and be taught our customs, and to go about clothed."²⁵ Even when the Amerindians offered resistance to the European occupation, they were still seen by Columbus as a mute people: "to send them home to Castile [as slaves] would not be anything but well, for they may one day be led to abandon that inhuman custom which they have of eating men, and there in Castile, learning the language, they will much more readily receive baptism and secure the welfare of their souls."²⁶ We can begin to know

²³ Ibid., 185.

²⁴ Ibid., 67; 69.

²⁵ Ibid., 235; 237.

²⁶ Cecil Jane, ed., *Selected Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus*, vol. 2: The Third and Forth Voyages, (London: Kackluyt Society, 1933), 88. For an analysis of Columbus' positions about the slavery of the Amerindians, see: Pagán, *Evangelización y Violencia*, p. 153-161.

here the implications of Columbus' understanding of what salvation meant for the Amerindians, namely, the learning of the colonizer language and the service to the colonizer.

In spite of their muteness in speaking the language that would "secure the welfare of their souls," at some point in his journals, Columbus does conceive the fact that the Amerindians can speak. Moreover, they also have – at least at some obscure level – religion. The form in which this sudden voice and religiosity of the Amerindians show up in Columbus' descriptions is striking:

As soon as it dawned I ordered the ship's boat and the caravels made ready and went north-northeast along the island... also to see the villages... as well as people, who all came to the beach calling us and *giving thanks to God*... others, when they saw that I did not care to go ashore, threw themselves into the sea swimming and came to us, and we understood that they were asking us *if we had come from the heavens*. And one old man got into the ship's boat, and others in loud voices called to all the men and women: *Come see the men who came from the heavens*.²⁷ [Emphases added]

Worthy of note here is the switch from the more general statement "we understood" that Spaniards "had come from the heavens" to the assurance that the Amerindians were actually saying: "Come see the men who came from the heavens." On a later entry, this conviction would be intensified: "But they did believe that the Spaniards came from the heavens and that the realms of the kings of Castile were in the heavens and not in this world."²⁸ The same perception is present when Columbus receives the *cacique* in his ship and puts these words in his mouth: "What great Lords your Highnesses must be... since from so far away and from the heavens they had sent [you] here without fear."²⁹ More than simply putting words in the Amerindians' mouths, Columbus indeed theologizes for the natives and, quite conveniently, places himself in the great soteriological position of the man from heaven.

It is difficult to know from these preceding passages what happened to the assumption Columbus previously makes about the lack of religion among the Amerindians, since they give thanks to "God." In a different entry, the Admiral

²⁷ Dunn and Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America*, 73; 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

even describes how they “prayed” and “venerated” an “impressive cross” the Spaniards raised on the center of a village.³⁰ From these descriptions, one is left with the impression that when it comes to worshipping the men from heaven, the Amerindians are indeed a very religious and, for that matter, even Christian people. Perhaps what Karl Rahner (colonially) identified as the “anonymous Christians,” here has its first historical irruption: the Amerindians praise God and the Spaniards say “amen”!

Columbus’ self-understanding as the man from heaven brings to light the pivotal connection soteriology has with the question of power. As the theologian *and* the explorer, Columbus is able to theologize for the Amerindians by announcing the arrival of their Savior. Exemplary of this matter is his encounter with the cacique, where two figures of power meet but only one of them registers theology out of the encounter. Columbus makes sure to establish the boundaries of his power by making the cacique bow to his superiority as the man from heaven. In this sense, the power differential is constructed from within as a self-imposed subservience whereby the colonized pathetically recognizes the superiority of his colonizer. To add some colors to this subservience, Columbus uses a Christian notion of heaven to reinforce even more his own power in relation to the “earthly” Amerindians.

Appropriating a “soft” and apparently harmless use of power, Columbus’ theology puts the savior on board of the Spanish vessels and inaugurates the time of salvation for the damned people of Guanahani. As the people from heaven imperially set their tents in this salvation-less land, the earth is rapidly converted in the land of the savior and its indigenous people are introduced to the god who will at some point demand their sacrifices.

Paradise on a woman’s nipple

Speculations about the geographical location of paradise have a long history that precedes Columbus and thus influences what he envisions as the discovery of paradise in his third voyage. In his acclaimed book *A History of Heaven* Jeffrey Burton Russell points out to the centrality of images of heaven, hell and purgatory in the formation of a collective imagery in European spirituality – an imagery that was theoretically articulated in the universities but

³⁰ Ibid., 247.

also popularly developed in literature, folklore and artworks.³¹ While affirming the geographical possibility of the earthly paradise, this tradition for the most part also affirms the theological impossibility of accessing this divine reality,³² a paradox that will be important to bear in mind as we read Columbus' accounts of his third voyage. In the work of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, it appears as if the transcendental aspect of paradise that most medieval authors tried to preserve loses space to an affirmation of a paradisiacal space that is not only geographically located, but most of all erotically and theologically conquerable.

Already on his first voyage, Columbus speculates about the matter when reflecting on the weather he encountered in the islands of the Caribbean. Claiming the authority of "venerable theologians" and "wise philosophers" he states that it is certain that the "terrestrial paradise is at the end of the Orient because it is a most temperate place."³³ This theme, however, would come back with greater emphasis when Columbus reaches the island of Trinidad on the entrance to the bay of Paria (in the northern part of South America) during his third voyage. This is when, quite confidently and piously, the Admiral discovers the entrance to paradise located at the top of the earth which is geo-erotically described as a "woman's nipple."

Columbus' third voyage began in 1498 officially as a colonizing mission to bring supplies to the occupied islands in the Caribbean and increase the military force to repress the indigenous revolts that were popping up in the new colony.³⁴ Yet, motivated by his messianic faith, Columbus planned navigating south of the island of Hispaniola to follow an intuition that a great quantity of land could be found there.³⁵ There, after an "infernal" week of heat and problems with the ships, he saw far to the west *three* great mountains and thus

³¹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: the Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 104-113. See also: Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, transl. by Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995), 39-43.

³² Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 43-48.

³³ Dunn and Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America*, 383.

³⁴ Cf. Symcox and Carrillo, eds., *Las Casas on Columbus: The Third Voyage*, 7.

³⁵ According to Geoffrey Symcox, Columbus was aware that an English expedition led by John Cabot had recently discovered land to the north and that the Portuguese Vasco da Gama had managed to reach India by crossing the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa; both of these facts most likely influenced Columbus to navigate south from Hispaniola looking for a large quantity of land mass. See: Symcox and Carrillo, eds., *Las Casas on Columbus: The Third Voyage*, 8-9.

the island was baptized as *Trinidad*. As he explores the area and enters the peninsula of Paria, Columbus begins to suspect that he might have reached a new continent. This is when his theological views gain a major role in his description of the land.

Columbus' assurance of the fact that he had reached paradise was the combination of several factors. He first questions Ptolemy's cosmology arguing that the world, rather than being simply round, was more like a "pear, which is everywhere round except where the stalk is, for there it is very prominent." Perhaps to better illustrate his cosmology, Columbus draws an amusing image: "[the world] is like a very round ball, and on the one part of it is placed something like a woman's nipple, and that this part, where the protuberance is found, is the highest and nearest to the sky, and it is beneath the equinoctial line and in this Ocean sea at the end of the East."³⁶ As the ships would approach the surroundings of Trinidad, Columbus is impressed with the fact that the ships would run smoothly as indeed they were arriving in a special place. In his theo-erotico-cosmological scheme, Columbus' fleet navigates up into the earth's paradisiacal nipple, almost as if the boats were coming closer and closer to the great orgasmic encounter with heaven.

The sequence of Columbus' narrative presents three other arguments that corroborate to his thesis that the land he had reached was the earthly paradise. First, he notes a change in the weather as the boats flowed closer to Trinidad and the temperatures dropped to the "mildest" weather.³⁷ Secondly, the Admiral notices a difference in the people of the land which apparently puts them closer to a divine order: "And the people there I found to be of very fair stature and whiter than the others who have been seeing in the Indies, and their hair long and smooth, and they are shrewder and have greater intelligence and are not cowards."³⁸ Finally, Columbus believes that the amount of water he sees coming from the land to the Ocean is a sign of the confluence of the four great rivers described in the book of Genesis as flowing from Eden.³⁹

These remarks testify to the fact that Columbus had reached the land closer to the top of the world where the earthly paradise was to be located. This is his conclusion about the geography of paradise:

I do not hold that the earthly paradise is in the form of a rugged mountain, as its description declares to us, but that the

³⁶ Jane, ed., *Selected Documents Illustring the Four Voyages of Columbus*, 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30; 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

stalk of the pear is, and that, going towards it from a distance, there is a gradual ascend to it. And I believe no one could reach the summit as I have said... These are the great indications of the earthly paradise, for the situation agrees with the opinion of those wise theologians, and also the signs are very much in accord with this idea.⁴⁰

Even though he is careful enough to say that this place cannot be reached, his final thoughts evince that he does believe that this piece of paradisiacal land can be possessed by the Spanish monarchs: "And now," he completes, "while you receive information concerning the matter of these lands which I have discovered, in which I am assured the earthly paradise is, the adelantado will go with three ships, well equipped, to that place to examine it further, and they will discover all that they can in those parts."⁴¹ Furthermore, arriving back in Spain in 1501, Columbus feels he is even more certain of his active role in discovering this sacred place:

I came with such earnest love to serve these princes, and I have served with a service that has never been heard or seen... *I entered upon a new voyage to a new heaven and a new earth*, which up to then had lain hidden, and if this, like the other voyages to the Indies, be not regarded there, it is no wonder, *for through my exertions it has come to knowledge.*⁴²

However distant and impossible to be achieved by human beings, the earthly paradise can be explored and its discovery must be acknowledged as a result of Columbus' efforts as the mediator between European Christendom and God's paradise.

In her study of Columbus' theology, Catherine Keller highlights how colonialism in the Americas was capable of creating and occupying a space – the feminized and virgin space of the Amerindians – that is theologically appropriated as private property.⁴³ She refers to the association between the planet's shape and a woman's nipple as Columbus' "carto-pornography" and calls our attention to the implications of this association:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴² Ibid., 48; 50.

⁴³ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 140-150.

[In Columbus] we sense the transmutation of paradise into an erotic place of commodification... The world shaped like a woman's breast culminating at its nipple in paradise... focuses the colonial adventure... The continent looms as forbidden fruit, the virgin body ripe for the plucking, the mother breast ready to suckle death-ridden, depressed Europe into its rebirth.⁴⁴

According to Keller then, Columbus actually materializes this imagination when he identifies a precise location for paradise. The Admiral's self-proclaimed messianic role is that of dis-covering paradise, of taking out its clothes of mystery so that the "new creation becomes the icon of a stabilized paradise fixed in space."⁴⁵ Read through the lens of feminist theologians, Columbus and his vessels are the representation of the male hysteria in penetrating the feminized space, here depicted not simply as the mother-earth but also as the new heaven. Columbus discovers not simply a place, but in fact the original space which is also the place where all things will come together in the parousia.

Anne McClintock traces a long tradition in western thought of "male travel as an erotics of ravishment."⁴⁶ She insightfully associates the cartography produced in the first years of the colonization of the Americas, including Columbus' "porno-tropic" association between paradise and a woman's nipple, as the sexist discourse of men which relates unknown lands with feminized images.⁴⁷ The female body, in this sense, is the liminal reality that introduces the European men to a new world. The ambiguity of this imagery, McClintock argues, is that it brings to light paradoxical masculine feelings: on one side it evinces the megalomaniac excitement for discovery with its "fantasy of unstoppable rapine" and, on the other side, it shows a certain infantile "fear of engulfment," an anxiety of being taken over and losing oneself in this exotic novelty.⁴⁸

Keller sees this fear at place in the case of Columbus when he decides to flee from the entrance of paradise and head north to solve practical issues of the colonial administration in Hispaniola.⁴⁹ The discovery of paradise has this

⁴⁴ Ibid., 156-157.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁶ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York/London: Routledge, 1995), 22.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 26-27.

⁴⁹ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 157.

ambivalent meaning to Columbus: it is the symbol of his messianic calling and superiority but it also the fearful warning that he might have reached a place that would dis-place him from his colonial power. Climbing the sacred nipple of the earth might mean the reaching of a place where the Admiral's power would no longer be valid. To avoid the possibility of that happening, Columbus navigates back to the place where his power is safely established.

If in his first voyage Columbus places himself as the savior of the land, in his third voyage he is the discoverer of the salvific place whereby salvation history is initiated and will collide in a short future that he has opened. What came next in the Admiral's colonial soteriology was precisely this domination of time and an interpretation of history that places the occupation of the Americas as the event that opened history to its end. I turn my attentions now to this issue.

Conquering History

The climax of Columbus' eschatological beliefs takes places with the compilation of his *Libro de las Profecias*, a notebook assembled in Spain between 1501 and 1502 with the assistance of the Carthusian monk Gaspar Gorrichio. The writing of the book is flavored with historical events that possibly assured Columbus of his apostolic calling: in 1501, after "discovering paradise" and navigating back to the island of Hispaniola, the Admiral was arrested and, humiliated, returned to Spain in chains.⁵⁰ Sick, humiliated and having faced arrest (like a true apostle), Columbus' reclusion gives birth to an exaggeration of his faith and the compilation of a theology of history that places the occupation of the Americas as the key event for the emergence of a new epoch of the Spirit.

The compilation of the Book of Prophecies was Columbus' life project: manuscripts of it can be traced as early as 1481 and a possible revision to it was done in 1505, a year prior to Columbus' death. This certainly attests to the fact that Columbus' millenarianism precedes his voyages and was only reinforced and strengthened by it; in West's terms, the Book of Prophecies "serve[s] as bookends around [Columbus'] mind and discovery."⁵¹ The notebook is divided in three parts that can be roughly described as prophecies that have already taken place, prophecies about to take place, and prophecies

⁵⁰ William D. Phillips, Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 225.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

about the end of times. The Admiral gathers passages from 43 different books of the Bible, 21 ancient authors, 33 Medieval authorities,⁵² combined with several marginal glosses where his interpretation of these texts is elicited.

Theologically speaking, the Book of Prophecies presents Columbus as a mature lay theologian in dialogue with the Christian tradition and the experiences in the Americas since 1492 as interpreted through the lens of Christendom. At this point, Columbus' eschatology is fully consistent with the colonization and evangelization of the peoples of the new lands discovered to the west and the dream of conquering Zion to the east. Explaining his theological interpretation of history, he concludes saying that only "one hundred and fifty years are lacking for the completion of the seven thousand years which would be the end of the world"⁵³ and, making use of a problematic interpretation of Joachim de Fiore, Columbus finally asserts that the trigger figure to open history to its eschatological end would come out of Spain.⁵⁴

In the letter to the Spanish monarchs introducing his notebook Columbus reinforces his apostolic mission claiming that God has given him all the abilities and desire necessary to accomplish the task of navigating to the Indies. He says: "I lay aside all the sciences and books I indicated above. I hold only to the sacred Holy Scriptures, and to the interpretations of prophecy by certain devout persons who have spoken on this subject by divine illumination."⁵⁵ Later on he is even more emphatic in his claim:

[F]or the execution of the journey to the Indies I was not aided by intelligence, mathematics or by maps. It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied, and this is what I desire to write in this book... I said above that much of the prophecies remained to be fulfilled, and I believe that there are great events for the world. This evidence is the fact that the gospel the Gospel must now be proclaimed to so many lands in such a short time.⁵⁶

⁵² See: *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 111. For more information for the reasons that possibly led Columbus to interpret Fiore's work in this manner can be found in this same work, p. 28ff. Right after this passage, ten pages were removed from Columbus' original text, leaving us with the doubt of what his appropriation of this author was.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

Circulating with authority around these sources, Columbus proves himself to be a systematic interpreter and a consistent theologian with an evangelistic vision that guided him as he navigated across the Ocean Sea.

What is this vision? Let me point out one example from the Admiral's glosses on these prophecies to show how he assembles his theological interpretation of history. After a long section in which he selects several biblical Psalms and a few ancient authorities, Columbus goes to Augustine's *Soliloquies* on chapter 26 where questions related to other nations' idolatry are discussed. Columbus highlights Augustine's reference to Jeremiah's calling ("Before I formed you in the womb I knew you," Jeremiah 1:5) and then notes that this calling is related to the fact that the "islands of the Gentiles" would be converted to God.⁵⁷ Later on, moving to Nicolas of Lyra, Columbus remembers that "there is another preaching of the gospel that is yet to take place, with such effectiveness that "all the Gentiles will accept the faith of Christ; and this shall take place at the end of the age." Almost immediately after this passage, Columbus quotes the "great commission" from Matthew 28 and then goes to Psalm 71 to say: "And he shall rule from sea to sea."⁵⁸ Hence, the interpretation comes to the surface: in the end of times, God will grant power ("all power is given to me," Matt 28:18) to control the seas so that the Gentiles will abandon their idols and the Christian faith is proclaimed to all the earth. Columbus' discourse, therefore, identifies his location within the prophetic tradition since Jeremiah, establishes a teleological point of reference in history and, finally, identifies his God-given power to rule over the seas so that the islands of the Gentiles can be converted.

The whole Book of Prophecies follows this pattern. Columbus theologically legitimizes his enterprise in the Americas by placing his feat as the catalyzing event of history's grand-finale. The salvation-less lands of the Americas are now also perceived as past-less but, paradoxically, as the place of the eschatological future. Europe's past is transferred to the "new" world that is invented as America, a place with no past, only future. Pagán notes that Columbus embraces a kind of providentialism and messianism that "graphically express the Christian-against-infidels hermeneutical optics that is artificially imposed on the wars against the indigenous peoples."⁵⁹ What is noteworthy about this dynamic is the fact that the universalism of Columbus' theology of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 153; 155.

⁵⁹ Pagán, *Evangelización y Violencia*, 87.

history – all history bends towards its culmination in the near future – is nothing but the provincialism of the struggles in southern Spain during the late fifteenth century. It is a universal theology of providence rooted on a single province of the earth – a provincial providentialism.

If before, with the discovery of paradise, Columbus theo-erotically occupies the sacred space of salvation, here in the Book of Prophecies he articulates a theory of history that flattens history to a single line pointing to the “coloniality of power” as the grand articulator of salvation to all peoples. The notion of providence, when unchallenged, easily becomes the history of the feats of the powerful which are associated with the feats of God. The control of history that Columbus has in order to organize all past, present and future events in order to make his point constantly associates God with the conquerors. The history-less Amerindians once again remain pathetically silent waiting for the colonizers to add them to the book of life which, of course, is written in Spanish (and, later on, translated into English!). Salvation in these terms means assimilation with the grand narrative of the powerful, finding a branch in the genealogy of the kings and emperors.

De-Colonizing Heaven

The themes I just presented can inform our understanding of this that I am calling a colonial soteriology that Columbus articulates in his texts. It is a doctrine of salvation that identifies the colonizer as the savior, the soteriological spaces as conquerable and salvation history as the linear history of the flow of power from the top to the bottom. Going to heaven, if I should be allowed to use this more “traditional” understanding of what salvation means, is not much different than going to the metropolis. The Amerindians Columbus ships to Spain so that they “may learn to speak” and have the “welfare of their souls secured” are examples of that. They are saved as they learn the language of their colonizers and profess the God who demanded their sacrifice. As the new lands are discovered to the west and the colonial enterprise thrives in the Americas, Europe itself starts to ascend to the pinnacle of the earth’s paradisiacal nipple as the transnational power which mediates salvation to the rest of the world.

In the final paragraphs of this essay I want to reflect for a while in what I perceive to be the major characteristic of Columbus’ colonial soteriology, namely, the articulation of a theory of the Amerindians’ ontological condemnation which serves his project of placing himself as their savior. As it should be clear at this point, soteriology is not a harmless doctrine about heaven and its inhabitants, about who will go “up” and who will go “down.” As the

famous image of the separation of the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 shows, even the rather distant notion of an eschatological judgment is intrinsically related to matters concerning very “earthily” things like food, water, clothing, and so on, which of course will bring several implications for our understanding of salvation. The heavenly “streets of gold,” to cite yet another biblical example (Rev 21:21), must have had a very particular meaning in the ears of the Amerindians and African slaves extracting gold from the American mines. Quite literally indeed, as the colonizers paved their ways (and churches) with the gold from the Americas, slaves descended to the ashes of the mines digging their own way toward the under-world of the dead. It is simply naïve to believe that salvation (even in its most aerial formulations) has no connections with the materiality of the world.

In Columbus’ theology, what is hard to miss is that salvation is articulated firstly by the condemnation of the Amerindians which then opens the space for the salvific intervention of the colonizers. As the themes I selected from Columbus’ texts show, there is a condemnation that precedes any soteriological affirmation in the Admiral’s theology: the Amerindians are religion-less, the land is empty and thus conquerable, and history has no past (it is inaugurated with the arrival of the Europeans). It is worthwhile to revisit the Admiral’s initial observation about the state of the Amerindians: “And later the benefits will be known and efforts will be made to make all these people Christian; because it will be done easily, since they have no religion nor are they idolaters.”⁶⁰ They are then “destined to be Christians because of the desire they seem to have and that of the sovereigns of Castile, and because the Admiral already considers the Indians as their subjects.”⁶¹ As a theological project, colonialism creates the salvation-less state of the Amerindians and immediately fills this emptiness with the call for their submission to the power of the empires.

Strikingly, Columbus’ desire to save the “Indians” is not matched with an assertion about what needs to be saved in them. “Indeed,” Rieger aptly asserts, “for the *conquistadors*, true conversion (in the sense of a holistic change of life) was not the point; there was a marked difference between Spaniards and Amerindians, and that difference did not need to be eliminated; indeed, it facilitated exploitation.”⁶² Clearly, it is not sin that concerns Columbus in his contacts with the Amerindians but the preoccupation that they become

⁶⁰ Dunn and Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America*, 183;185.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 265.

subjected to the crown. In fact, the Amerindians are never addressed as sinners in Columbus' accounts of his trips: sinning is a "luxury" that the Amerindians did not share in Columbus' theology – they live in a state of ontological condemnation. In his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon notes that the colonial logic relates the colonized as the ontologically evil and the way to their salvation as equivalent to becoming assimilated to the world of the colonizer.⁶³ The salvation that the Spanish empire offers only makes sense by this initial and necessary damnation of the other who thus becomes dependent of the soteriological mediatory action of the colonial savior. This is the logic of the colonial soteriology: *I damn you, therefore I save you*.

Insofar colonial soteriology presupposes the ontological condemnation of the colonized we are dealing here with a clear sacrificial model of salvation. It is for the good of the world – indeed for its salvation – that some may be sacrificed to satisfy the needs of a more noble cause. Jung Mo Sung proposes that the (transcendental) sacrificial logic of ancient is intact today in free market economy; sacrifices bring "progress," "democracy" and so on and, once these objectives are achieved, the sufferings of the sacrificed are deleted from human memory.⁶⁴ From the perspective of the biblical prophetic tradition, Sung is able to conclude saying that gods that demand sacrifices should be properly addressed as idols. "Our challenge, then," he subscribes, "is how to construct a notion of transcendence that orients our interpretation of reality and our actions but is not sacrificial..."⁶⁵ Thus the problem of a colonial soteriology is its idolatry in demanding sacrifices of the colonized for the benefit of those in power. To follow Sung's challenge, the task is to build a soteriology that does not articulate an ontology of condemnation as the basis for its doctrine of redemption – a soteriology that no longer controls the others in order to save them.

In my judgment, this challenge is best responded to in the contribution that Latin American liberation theology has given to Christian soteriology. This contribution, in short, is precisely the problematization of the notion of salvation as something that can be quantified – and therefore *controlled*. Liberation theology is not primarily concerned in discussing whether some will be saved or damned in a posthumous future; rather, it assumes (more than assumes, perhaps, it *sees*) that indeed some are *already* damned in this life, living in conditions that deny the life given and promised by God. As an early

⁶³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 3-7.

⁶⁴ Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key*. (London: SCM Press, 2009), 66-67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

study about Latin American liberation theology's soteriology put it, "[w]hile in the First World it may be fashionable for theologians to consider such questions as Is there life after death? in Latin America [the poor] are more concerned with the possibility of life after *birth*."⁶⁶

Gustavo Gutiérrez inaugurates this contribution by stating that Christian traditional soteriology has been reduced to a discussion focused on the separation of the saved from the damned – what he terms the “quantitative” aspect of salvation.⁶⁷ Contrary to that, Gutierrez proposes a “qualitative” approach to soteriology, one that understands salvation as that which embraces all human reality, transforming it and leading it to its fullness in Christ.⁶⁸ This insight in fact sets the place for an intense theological debate among liberation theologians in order to think the historicity of salvation and its multiple connections with the life and mission of the church in its present. Ignacio Ellacuría, for example, approaches the matter by claiming that God's transcendence is a not a transcendence *away from*, but a transcendence *in* that impels “to *more* but not taking *out of*.”⁶⁹ So soteriology cannot be thought of as the doctrine of the things that shall take place away from us (historically and geographically), but as that which calls for transformation, a transcendence in history. Mayra Rivera (who studies Ellacuría's work) has poignantly affirmed that God's transcendence is always “*beyond* our grasp” but not “beyond our touch”⁷⁰ – an insight that surely offers challenges for thinking about salvation as that which we cannot categorize but nevertheless as that which we can corporeally experience. These notions of transcendence also offer a good response to the colonial soteriology here exemplified by Columbus' theology: salvation is not that which can be controlled and brought about by the agents of empire by their discursive division between the saved and the damned, but a

⁶⁶ Atilio René Dupertuis, *Liberation Theology: a Study in its Soteriology* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1982), 105.

⁶⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: history, politics and salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 150.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” in: Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 254.

⁷⁰ Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: a Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 2.

transformational event that goes beyond the imperial logic, towards a truly *new* world.⁷¹

The soteriology articulated by the colonial powers (and I am taking Columbus as one paradigmatic example of that) might well proclaim that salvation is not associated with the specific dynamics of colonialism – we should be mindful that Columbus does recognize that paradise cannot be fully assessed by human beings. However, the imposition of this ontological damnation on the colonized that I have been discussing necessarily implies that the colonizer have a special salvific role in the redemption of the damned of the colonies. Without them, as Columbus explicitly states, salvation would not come to these places and peoples.⁷² Colonial soteriology always assumes that the missionaries are saved whereas the “natives” are in need of salvation. The saviors are those in the vessels, those who possess the English book, as Homi Bhabha would say.⁷³

What if we were to think differently? What if salvation flowed not from above (from the centers of power), but from around the margins displacing the center? What if we were to ascribe a “prevenient” salvation to the pre-Colombian Americas – certainly not one that perceives the Amerindians as “anonymous Christians” waiting to be “named” by the colonizers, but one that perceived a multi-vocal flow of the Spirit before the arrival of the Spaniards? Moreover, what if this salvation that precedes the proclamation of Columbus’ colonial con-damnation of the Amerindians would offer a new vision about the Christian understanding of salvation? What if we need to be “saved” from our desire to save others?

These are not rhetorical questions I pose here. I do believe that these questions are important to be discussed as we pursue alternative ways of understanding what it means to be saved and to proclaim, among other things, that Jesus Christ saves. According to Paul, the message of the cross (should we say the message of the crosses?) is the power of God for those who are “being saved” (1 Cor 1:18). While the power of the colonizers imposes an ontological condemnation on others, God’s power to save is a scandal to some and foolishness to others (v. 23) – it is a salvation that takes place among those who

⁷¹ For a consistent discussion about the transcendence of the empire and a resistant transcendence, see the third chapter in: Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*.

⁷² Jane, ed., *Selected Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus*, 48;50.

⁷³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010 [Copyright 1994]), 145-154; 166-170.

have been con-damned by the “rulers of this age” (1 Cor 2:8). The con-damnation of some when framed under the notion of God’s power has a soteriological meaning that surpasses this imposed con-damnation.

There are alternative soteriologies that emerge when we recognize the presence of grace in the places where empires have only identified dis-grace. This saving presence that predates and surpasses the gaze of the colonial saviors is notwithstanding a surprise – a form of grace that is totally absurd from the perspective of the colonizers. This grace of the dis-graced, the soteriology of the damned, dispels the salvific discourse of the colonizers who presuppose the ontological damnation of the other. Salvation leaks from places and people in which empires can only perceive damnation.

As efforts to save others are still in vogue today as global empires circulate around the world with plans of bringing about the miracles of democracy, free-market economy and so on, it is important to be aware of the sacrifices that these new imperial gods make. For those who see God through the scandal of crosses, however, it might be the case that a soteriology of the damned emerges in radical opposition to the salvation promised by the soteriological agents of these gods.

Resumen

El artículo nos presenta al explorador-colonizador que Colón, el almirante genovés, como un notable ejemplo de un teólogo que articula y su teología desde una perspectiva colonial. Los académicos que trabajan con sus textos no han dejado de señalar a sus creencias mesiánicas en sí mismo y sobre el significado escatológico de su misión en las "Indias." Él es una persona muy versada e intencionalmente mantiene una conversación con las autoridades principales cristianas. Su entusiasmo por las nuevas tierras y oportunidades hacia el oeste están siempre unidas con la proclamación de la necesidad de la evangelización de las nuevas colonias. Desde el principio los colonizadores construyeron una soteriología colonial que basa la expansión del territorio europeo a las nuevas tierras americanas.

Por estas razones, el artículo aborda el tema de la soteriología colonial a través de sus escritos tales como: Las narrativas de sus viajes a las Américas en sus diarios, cartas a las autoridades españolas, y en su libro *Las Profecías*, compilado al final de su vida. En estos escritos se destacan tres temas, los cuales sirven como la base del discurso salvífico en la teología de Colón: (1) la asociación de los colonizadores como "gente del cielo" - una declaración teológica que Colón pone en la boca de los amerindios, (2) el descubrimiento geo-erótico del paraíso terrenal llamado el "pezón del pecho de la mujer" localizado en las orillas del río Orinoco, y (3) la articulación de una teología de la historia que coloca el descubrimiento de las Américas como la gran señal de la llegada de la parusía. Estos temas articulados en los textos de Colón, forman un cuerpo teológico que identifica a un salvador, una teoría del espacio de la salvación, y su propia historia de la salvación. Después de presentar y criticar a estos temas, el artículo concluye con una reflexión acerca de la perspectiva colonial de la soteriología de Colón y propone a nuevos puntos de vista y discusiones sobre este tema.

Las cuales argumentan que la historiografía colonial es un "escrito que conquista," un escrito que "fabrica la historia de Occidente" en los cuerpos de los pueblos oprimidos de las Américas. Las lecturas históricas que se presentan en este artículo se oponen a la historiografía colonial ya que se centra en la historia de aquellos que han pasado, menos en esta historiografía colonial y la teología. Este artículo es un intento, como Mayra Rivera afirma, "para recordar a un futuro diferente." La teología de la salvación que se presenta en este artículo no es neutral - es un intento de encontrar una alternativa basada en la doctrina de la salvación a los que se proyectado y inventado como los

condenados. Se trata de una teología de la salvación, con una crítica de la historia articulada por los poderosos y es un llamado a ellos para que encuentren salvación al escuchar las voces de quienes han sido olvidados en una historia selectiva que niega su participación.

Decolonizing Home Re-envisioning Nomadic Identities at the Border of Globalization

An Yountae

*Because I, a mestiza, continually walk
out of one culture and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que
me hablan simultáneamente
- Gloria Anzaldúa*

Some of the most disturbing questions among the many whirring voices that have often haunted me through the trajectory of my nomadic life, are “where is your home?” or “which place do you miss the most?”

As an Asian-Latino-American who carries the label of “non-resident” or “alien” as the very mark of my identity, and as a shuttling subject between multiple worlds being able to fit neither here nor there, I often find myself lost in the in-between space: lost in translation and assimilation; lost in the sense of incompleteness and non-belongingness; lost in the burden of mimicry and the fear of being rejected because of my “difference.”

Before moving into a detailed discussion of home and identity, I should point out that the sense of belongingness, which I have always longed for, is closely tied to the question of how we construct space – particularly that space we call “home.” As Korean feminist theologian Namsoon Kang puts it, how we understand home, is “a very complex political question that reveals one’s geopolitical, epistemological and ontological location.”² In other words, the trope of “home” is the hermeneutical ground on which conventional notions of identity, power and space are put into question.

In our age where the world is becoming “globalized” with its homogenizing tone, driven by the late-capitalist ethos, it is not only capital led by transnational corporations that cross borders but also labor, thus creating cultural shifts in the urban landscape of first-world metropolitan centers.

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 99.

² Namsoon Kang, *Out of Place: Asian Feminist Theology of Dislocation*, in Pierson, Clive and Jione Havea eds., *Out of Place*, (London: Equinox Press, 2008), 5.

Current global reality shows that nearly three percent of the world population -- hitting almost two hundred million in statistics -- live in foreign countries as migrants, refugees, or temporary residents. What implication does this shifting demographic texture of the global world have for people concerned with speaking of God and of the human person in relation to such cultural matrix?

Inspired by Nancy Bedford's proposal regarding the use of *Locus Theologicus* (the place of theology) in which she suggests, given both the reality of Latina/o immigrants in the U. S. as "structural debtors" of global economy and the fluid nature of immigrants' identity, that we use *Via Theologica* (a way or path of theology) in order to account the experience of migrant communities,³ I'll try to rethink home as mobile and multiple space. This endeavor will eventually lead us to re-construe the transitory and fragmental character of migrants' social/cultural identity as a new form of wholeness and integrity, as well as facilitating the substitution of what Eduardo Mendieta calls the "unhealthy nostalgia for home" with a newly envisioned sense of socio-ontological rootedness for an age of trans-locality where "home itself has succumbed to commodification."⁴

Negotiating the "Non-Negotiable"

According to cultural anthropologist William Safran, a "homeland orientation" is one of the major characteristics of diasporic communities.⁵ As people who have no alternative but to leave their homeland for various reasons, diasporic subjects are strongly attached to their identification with place: primarily with the homeland and secondarily with the host-land. In the process of navigating between these two spaces as well as negotiating between remembering and forgetting -- in between the collective cultural memory or the historical trauma of colonial history and the discrepant socio-political reality of

³ Nancy E. Bedford, *Speaking of God from more than One Place*, in, *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, Edited by Ivan Petrella, (New York: Orbis, 2005).

⁴ Eduardo Mendieta, *Global Fragments: Globalization, Latinamericanism, and Critical Theory*, (Albany, SUNY Press, 2007), 5.

⁵ William Safran, *Deconstructing and Comparing Diaspora*, in *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, 16.

the global world⁶ -- they often experience a sense of being lost in the space of "in-between." This is because the place of origin becomes an imagined territory, an irrecoverable space, and because the reality of the host-land remains always contradictory to the nostalgic memory of home. This in-between space of ambiguity which migrants inhabit as negotiators of the "non-negotiable"⁷ and as "almost the same but not quite"⁸ becomes, then, a hybrid site where conventional definitions that categorize identity and space are being questioned and negotiated: a site of both negotiation and subversion. As in the sense that Homi Bhabha has coined the term, diasporic subjects, as products of hybridity, perturb the coherent narrative of the colonial Master signifier by undermining both the authority and the identity of the hegemonic power. They mirror back a partial image of the self and presence to the fetishizing-colonial gaze through the unpredictability of their presence, thus unsettling the reproductive economy of colonial objectification:

Hybridity is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal. It is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.⁹

The complexity of migrants' identity and position opens a wave of skepticism that shakes the solid soil on which the colonial ideology of Western history and the firm ideological foundation of modern historicity, time and space are grounded. While not disregarding the criticisms regarding the process, agency and political effect of the overused term "hybridity," it should be affirmed that the experience of migrant communities in the world today is, itself, an epistemological rupture which is "located here and there, [and] reads

⁶ Lisa Lowe points out the precarious/ambiguous position of migrant subjects within the former colonial matrix by quoting the Marxist critique that the hegemonic imperative of a state-citizen narrative requires the negation of private interests in order to become the "abstract citizen" of the political state. This process, involves "forgetting" of the colonial history. See Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 159.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 13.

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994.), 86.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

back metropolitan history and regimes of knowledge.”¹⁰ Its ghostly return demands a radical shift in our notion of space and identity, especially in our ways of conceiving the “homeland” amidst such global landscape of cultural exchange as both the by-product and the burden of the homogenizing globalization.

Saving the Experience of Dislocation out of the Dislocation of Experience

One of the prevailing images of home in Christian theology is that of perceiving human beings as *not belonging to the world* (John 15:19). Partially infected by Platonic dualism, the New Testament talks about *our home as a heavenly one: a better country that we are longing for* (Heb 11:16). This image of home as an “already, not yet” time and space can be very useful, despite its dualistic nature, in that it can serve both as a sign of hope for “homeless” migrants while leaving room for human participation in the *pursuit* of an eschatological home. It could also potentially energize a strategy of maintaining critical distance in relation to the dominant culture and refusing to compromise with homogenizing social categories precisely through a constant act of crossing and re-crossing boundaries. Along these lines, some Asian American theologians have reflected on homelessness as a creative movement and nomadic spiritual pilgrimage.

Sang Hyun Lee refers to homelessness as a “sacred journey” where the experience of marginalization can “open new ways of re-appropriating and re-envisioning biblical themes of pilgrimage and home.”¹¹ In a similar fashion, Namsoon Kang reflects on home and dislocation as a “cognitive ground” out of which a wider vision and new consciousness are born. She calls the experience of dislocation “an experience of radical, transformative re-location” where one can gain a totally new perspective to “rewrite oneself” and envision new ways of positioning one’s home, be it epistemological, geopolitical, or ontological, while not losing the tension with the dominant socio-cultural system.¹² Kang’s invigorating endeavor of using dislocation as a steppingstone to building a new

¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, p. 3-10 cited in Kwok Pui-Lan, *Feminist Theology and Postcolonial Imagination*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 49.

¹¹ Sang Hyun Lee, “*Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology*,” in *Asian Americans and Christian Ministry* ed. Inn Sook Lee and Timothy D. Son recited in Anne Wonhee Joh, *The Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 9.

¹² Kang, 5-6.

consciousness is extended to the claim that “to do” Asian feminist theology “requires creating new ways of thinking without home and carrying a perspective of interstice.”¹³ She, therefore, suggests the idea of a “world traveling” theologian.¹⁴

Kang’s insightful attempt to develop a “liminal consciousness” that interrogates conventional social categorizations of identity and space resonates with my hope to envision the multiplicity of both identity and space. Consequently, Kang and other Asian American theologians’ reflection on dislocation are well aiming at saving the experience of dislocation from the colonial narrative that victimizes displaced bodies as “deprived muddles” as well as empowering the notion of human identity as mutating and nomadic. Nevertheless, their use of metaphors such as “the traveling theologian” or “thinking without home” may ironically strengthen a static sense of home and integrity, thus fixating migrants as “un-homely aliens.”

Certainly, for people who are ousted from their homeland and for people who are destitute of a place to belong to, “homeless-ness as cognitive ground for new consciousness” may be, instead of an alternative political positioning that dismantles the colonial logic, a romanticized intellectual vision that conflicts with their lived material reality as exiled bodies in a global age. Such metaphors pervade the Asian American theological matrix, hand in hand with the prevailing biblical images that support the idea of the human person as un-homely being. My argument is that these metaphors may stir up a “tired but unconsumed nostalgia” for home: an insatiable and “bittersweet realization that we all seek to return to imaginary homelands”¹⁵ which is unattainable and irrecoverable. Eventually, this projection of nostalgic desire onto imaginary space may contribute to the constant social production of perceiving dislocated subjects as lacking a complete sense of integrity: caught in a past, perhaps a past that never was, that might have been; eternally mourning for the lost home. Is it, then, not possible to challenge the social construction of identity and space *from our own home* – mobile and transitory as it may be – rather than being *out-of-place*? Shouldn’t we claim that it is more ethical to envision a counter-hegemonic politics of “thinking *with-in* home” instead of “thinking *with-out* home?” Can we envision a kind of home that fosters multiplicity and mobility rather than fixed singularity?

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵ Mendieta, 5.

Rhizomatic Multiplicity

*The genius is someone who knows how to make
everybody/the whole world a becoming.*

- Deleuze and Guattari¹⁶

In order to advance the key questions regarding identity and home discussed thus far, I want to turn to the French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator Felix Guattari whose work has been influential for the critiques of modern essentialist metaphysics. Deleuze and Guattari use the botanic metaphor, “rhizome”, in order to contrast to the hierarchical and unifying system of the “arboreal” model. One of the primary underpinning elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s argument regarding the notion of rhizome in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, is the non-dividable relationship between exteriority and interiority: every substance or being is affected and mutated by coming into contact with what lies on its exterior. In contrast to this rootsystem that spreads horizontally, the arboreal model, axiomatic for the dominant form of Western metaphysics, is that which assumes a strong unifying center where multiple branches return to the main root.

Disavowing the binary between desire and lack, Deleuze and Guattari understand desire in the Nietzschean “will to power” sense, thus promoting desire to a key constitutive element of not only every existing being but the whole universe. Thus, desire is what comprises and affirms each individual’s life instead of a negative symptom of a lack or loss. Seen from this perspective, it can be said that one’s mode of existence determined and constrained by particular possibilities of life, that is, the actual configuration of our lives and desires is produced by different lines that cut down our lives and free-flowing desires, and reduce them into particular segments. It is in this way that Deleuze and Guattari reveal the contingent nature of our spatio-temporal actualization in present reality, pushing us towards an adventurous open-endedness grounded in organic connectivity and multiplicity. Given their conception of human lives as symptoms of particular systems of organization that reduces multiple potentials of actual reality into repetitive patterns of assemblage, their critique of representation entails an imageless subjectivity that refuses such reiterative arrangement of body and desire. What they are ultimately aiming at, is, an open-ended ontology that allows the multiple dynamic streams of life to flow

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 200.

“according to immanent principles of desire.”¹⁷ By breaking from the “organized patterns that privilege a determinate set of connections among the elements and excludes others,”¹⁸ one is open to connection that “springs up at will,”¹⁹ in any kind of heterogeneity, and thus, is able to articulate a completely unpredictable meaning that is replete with novelties.

The rhizomatic home, seen from this perspective, knows no limits. It transgresses conventional somatic boundaries and makes everything a becoming, including the social construction of space as fixed and immutable. Subversive as its immanent-materialist tone may sound, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical endeavor to challenge the dominant Western metaphysical tradition of “stasis” may serve as an alternative ground upon which we can re-envisage home as multiple, fluid and peripatetic space. Nevertheless, to say that one’s identity is dependent on one’s encounter with others does not entail giving up one’s unique identity and submitting to imitation or assimilation but means rather “a capture of code:”²⁰ an act of “creating” new ways and intensities or rhythms in order to mingle with others. This process implies the collapse of the dichotomy of insider/outsider. In a continuous corporeal dance with others, multiple displaced bodies are invited into rhizomatic co-dwelling. One makes the unfamiliar place her/his home, not by assimilating or giving up one’s cosmopolitan citizenship, but by “strategically becoming” a “permanent resident.”²¹

Finding Diasporic Bodies a/multiple Home(s)

Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the botanic metaphor “rhizome” provides critical insight for re-envisioning “home” for twenty-first century nomadic subjects who inhabit an ambiguous space of interstitiality, especially, given that root-related metaphors are often employed around the discourse of home and dislocation. As I have discussed above, the Deleuzian rootedness, which premises a horizontal and poly-morphous movement, renders both space and

¹⁷ Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1999), 167.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

²¹ Here, I’m using “permanent resident” in terms of the immigration status. While gaining “citizenship” means to become naturalized and to be identified as an insider, the permanent residency gives the immigrant a free choice of residency, be it temporary or permanent.

identity flexible and fluid. In the same vein, as diasporic subjects navigating among multiple worlds, we may begin to re-imagine home as mobile and multiple. Just as Rita Nakashima Brock has rejected the binary of *either/or* logic in constructing her identity such as, in her own case, neither Asian nor American, suggesting that we use *both/and* logic, perhaps we might replace the dichotomous logic of envisioning home as *neither* here *nor* there with *both* here *and* there.

How, then, is it possible to re-envision home as multiple reality? What does it mean or imply that one has multiple homes? According to the logic of rhizome, the kind of multiplicity where the addition of a number or species cannot affect or change the whole is only a pseudo-multiplicity. In this sense, rhizomatic multiplicity would object to the commodification of “difference” as a signifier that merely gratifies the rhetoric of “multiculturalism” or “diversity.” Instead, it steadfastly challenges the universality of the Master signifier through its omniscient movement, as Laurel Schneider has suggested, where the focal point of centrality becomes disseminated, thus “creating new margins that themselves become centers of becoming.”²²

According to the Deleuzian logic of multiplicity, the *virtual* that is the experience of the moment and space never lived in actual time subsists in the free-flow of desire that runs beneath our actual experience: It awaits to burst and become new forms of being. Here, each and every point of emergence, to use Laurel Schneider’s words, is itself, a new point of centrality which makes the static essence of the center or the whole nonsensical. In this sense, the notion of multiple dwelling refuses to be a rhetorical strategy whose only purpose is the recovery of the sense of belongingness but a corporeal resistance to the hegemonic cultural politics that keeps reproducing both the dichotomous division and the socio-cultural disparity between center/margin or insider/outsider. Doubtlessly, this struggle should be primarily directed at reconfiguring bodily transactions which means that it is the sexual/racialized/gendered bodies that need to be translated into the currency that saves those rejected bodies out of the economy of (post)colonial consumption. A map with real topography rather than a tracing that reproduces what is already there, the rhizomatic home aims at a poly-morphous movement that deranges the imperial cartography through a hybrid fluidity and multiplicity that alienates the dominant metaphysics of oneness.

²² Laurel Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 176.

Understanding human identity as not an immutable essence but a constant process of self-recreating and becoming entails the rejection of theo-narratives and images of God that are indifferent to socio-cultural location. In this regard, the rhizomatic home may serve as a stable, yet moving ground for our re-construal of God and human identity as fluid and nomadic. Refusing to be fixed on both extremes, opting for neither solid stagnancy nor ceaseless drifting, the rhizomatic home is rather a middle ground: “it has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.”²³ Nevertheless, the Deleuzean middle is a middle that is “by no means an average” or a not-fitting-anywhere-interstice. Rather, it is where the stream that undermines its banks picks up speed.²⁴ It is a transition from “being” to “becoming.” It resembles the deep water of creation, *tehom*, as Catherine Keller suggests, where “what will be, is becoming”²⁵ in the chaos of creation that’s “ever giving birth to new life and new reality, ever folding in and pulling down, ever enveloping and ever pushing out.”²⁶

If the irony of late-capitalist globalization lies in the fact that it is a system which keeps producing “homeless” subjects in a world without borders, Deleuzean multiplicity suggests an ontological vision in which no one is excluded or devaluated by the expansion of certain values and certain hierarchized beings. In a similar vein, if the God envisioned from “out of place” has resulted in a similarity with economic globalization by building a notion of a deity who is transcendent to all socio-economic border/context, – just as globalization proposes a transcendental market system – doing theology from rhizomatic home requires the incorporation of the experience of migrants and displaced subjects into the center of our epistemological ground.

Certainly, the perception of territoriality and space propelled by economic globalization will keep negating both the identity and the multiple homes of nomadic subjects, thus leaving them as “homeless migrants” at the border of globalization. Depiste our mobile and peripatetic struggle, we will keep confronting the colonial logic just as the nostalgic ghost for homeland will keep haunting our post-colonial imagination. However, I suggest that the notion of rhizomatic home affirms that our nomadic experience and our rupturing memories, which interweaves the (colonial) past and the (neo-colonial) present,

²³ Deleuze and Guattari., 25.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 213.

²⁶ Schneider, 116.

the homeland and hostland, exceeds the terms of neo-colonial globalization. The rhizomatic home hints at the indomitable hope that the diasporic subjects' struggle will not stop evolving, breaking down new barriers and transforming the environment which constrains it, like the example of primitive fish quoted by Deleuze, that "when the sea dried... left its associated milieu to explore land, forced to stand on its own legs."²⁷

A home in-the-becoming, a becoming-at-home, the rhizomatic home occupies the middle space where the homeless and expelled bodies find roots, sense of belongingness and a cognitive ground from which to speak the hybrid grammar of their polyglossic God against the God of the monolingual empire.

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari., 51.

Resumen

Este artículo es una reflexión teórica sobre la experiencia de desplazamiento desde la perspectiva de identidades migratorias dentro del contexto movidizo de la globalización. Iniciando con una reflexión autobiográfica sobre mi jornada personal migratoria que abarca una larga trayectoria entre tres culturas diferentes, se discute el fenómeno contemporáneo de la ola migratoria cuya consecuencia ha de producir cambios culturales en el paisaje urbano de los principales centros metropolitanos alrededor del globo. Lo que emerge como resultado de este intercambio cultural a nivel global es la necesidad urgente de un cambio topográfico en las nociones convencionales de identidad, etnicidad y nacionalidad, así como en las doctrinas del ámbito teológico, especialmente la idea de Dios como Uno y estático.

Basado en la noción de *hibridéz* de Homi Bhabha, cuyo atributo subvierte cualquier tipo de binarismo jerárquico que crea la falacia de “lo puro y lo impuro” o “lo integro y lo fragmentario,” se atestigua que las identidades migratorias son ejemplos de *hibridez* que resisten la falsa creencia en la identidad estática como una identidad pura e integra. Por otra parte, existe el peligro de romantizar la experiencia del desplazamiento/exilio por medio del lenguaje intelectual y teórico. En la segunda parte de este artículo, se analizan los discursos filosóficos y teológicos del desplazamiento que tiende a apropiarse y desrepresentar las realidades históricas y materiales de los sujetos desplazados. Dichos discursos, mientras intentan estetizar la experiencia del desplazamiento, irónicamente crean nuevos binarismos y esencialismos a través de la producción de nostalgia y melancolía por la pérdida de un pasado puro.

Como conclusión, se adopta la noción del *rizoma* del filósofo Gilles Deleuze y se propone la identidad humana como nómada. La noción del *rizoma* brinda un sentido de fluidez más allá de una flexibilidad móvil. *Rizoma* no solo abandona el eje céntrico, sino marca y reclama nuevos ejes céntricos y nuevos puntos de devenir. Todos los seres, incluso Dios, devienen y se transforman en los nuevos puntos rizomáticos, marcando nuevos comienzos en sus despliegues de nuevas potencialidades virtuales.

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